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Senate votes to end link

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What's next

- The House will take up its version of the farm bill — minus nutrition, trade and other provisions the Senate added — after returning late this month.
- The two houses will then work out their differences, and President Clinton will decide whether to sign.

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted yesterday to scrap the decades-old link between farm prices and government subsidies, giving farmers instead a series of fixed but declining payments. The action could lead to an eventual end of farm payments.

The 64-32 vote came despite a last-ditch fight by Democrats who wanted to save at least some connection between prices and payments. But that effort failed, 63-33. Democrats charged Republicans were offering welfare to farmers while cutting money for education, school lunches and health care for the poor.

In exchange for less government support, controls over most planting decisions would end, along with requirements that acres be idled.

Kentucky Sens. Mitch McConnell and Wendell Ford both voted in favor of the farm bill.

The overhaul of the way the government supports corn, cotton, rice and wheat won't be debated in the House for several weeks.

It was unclear whether the bill, in its final form, would persuade President Clinton not to carry out an earlier veto threat. Some changes sought by the administration, including a \$300 million, three-year required fund for rural water and sewer projects and other rural development, were made in the Senate.

Consumers could feel little effect, because raw ingredients make up a small

of farm prices, subsidies

share of supermarket costs. Backers say the bill will help farmers earn more by prodding them to plant for a growing world market. However, critics say that despite some reforms, the bill keeps in protections that make consumers pay more for sugar and peanuts.

Despite those attacks, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., successfully led a 59-36 vote to block an amendment by freshman Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., that would further cut the government-guaranteed price for peanuts and ease limits on who can grow them. Dole faces primary contests next month in Georgia and other peanut-growing states.

Republicans argue that the overhaul cuts farm spending 20 percent over seven years and gives the first real reform of New Deal policies.

Key provisions of Senate farm bill

- **Major crops:** Growers of corn, other feed grains, cotton, rice and wheat enter into seven-year "market transition contracts" that replace price-based subsidies with guaranteed but declining payments. Mandatory acreage idling and other production controls end.
- **Peanuts:** The government guaranteed price for peanuts lowered from \$678 a ton to \$510 a ton. It also eliminates the requirement that the volume of peanuts eligible for the price support be set at a minimum of 1.35 million pounds.
- **Sugar:** Ends assigned planting limits for domestic sugar growers, and lowers guaranteed minimum price by 1 cent a pound; still uses import restrictions to hold up prices.
- **Other:** Adds financing for programs that help farmers pay for conservation, also creates program that helps hog farmers, dairy farmers and others fight pollution from manure.
- **Nutrition:** Reauthorizes food stamps, emergency feeding and related nutrition programs for seven years.

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